

UNITY: Journalists of Color is an alliance of four national minority journalism organizations, the Asian American Journalists Association, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists Association and the Native American Journalists Association whose goal is to increase diversity in newsroom and in the coverage of communities of color. On behalf of our alliance, representing over 8,000 journalists of color, we urge the Federal Communications Commission to protect the openness of the Internet with strong Network Neutrality rules. We have a golden opportunity to avoid repeating the media's mistakes of the past, and we must seize the moment.

For journalists in general and journalists of color in particular, this is a crucial issue, and for communities of color it is as well. Network Neutrality protects the open Internet by preventing service providers from blocking or discriminating against content online. Without Net Neutrality, we run the risk of large phone and cable companies giving preferential treatment, better access and higher speeds to whoever can pay them the most. This would obliterate the Internet's current level playing field and erect additional barriers preventing journalists of color from providing our community with the news and information they need to participate in a democratic society.

Manifested in everything from riots to protest marches, we know first hand the harm that our nation's media system has caused to our communities. The influence of traditional media gatekeepers, sometimes mistakenly driven by market forces, have often produced wrong, non-contextual and distorted news that--sometimes immediately and certainly over time --have caused our communities to be disrespected, ignored, unfairly used as scapegoats, and stripped of an effective voice in the civic and political dialogue.

Our members have worked tirelessly to change how newsrooms portray communities of color. But too often, our members have been stifled by corporate media owners for whom serving our communities is not a priority. It is those gatekeepers who have often ignored our communities in their backyard while tending to the sought-after consumers of the suburbs. Our people's importance gets diminished, discrimination perpetuated by the media itself is allowed to flourish, unfair ad rates are sanctioned, minority media ownership declines, and the list goes on and on.

By acting now to protect the openness of the Internet, we have a chance to stop this from the get go. Some call Net Neutrality the First Amendment of the Internet -- and as so much of our media move online, it may become just as important for free speech. Network Neutrality will promote more speech, not less. It can empower journalists of color, as well as all people of color, by allowing them to speak directly to their communities without being censored by gatekeepers.

Few people of color have the financial resources to own large mainstream media outlets. But the Internet represents the lowest barrier of entry to create our own media presence. Creating an online

presence is more important now than ever since the number of journalists of color working at daily newspapers has declined sharply. In recent years, the number of journalists of color leaving the industry is greater than the number entering. The Internet offers journalists of color an opportunity to continue to fulfill their calling and to serve the information needs of our communities.

We believe they are wrong. Net Neutrality would prevent online discrimination, leave control in the hands of Internet users, and ensure our community's ability to access the content of their choice online. We are convinced it would not widen, but actually help close the digital divide as it offers a more level playing field to readers, consumers, entrepreneurs, small business owners and minority media owners who can more realistically compete in today's online media environment.

Some opponents of Network Neutrality have stated that the FCC should demonstrate with empirical evidence that the new rules would be solving a problem that currently exists. Others have said that the creation of a National Broadband Plan, which we also support, should be the government's highest priority, and moving on other proposed regulations should be delayed for further study.

We argue the opposite. It is precisely now, as the government is shaping media policy and creating a broadband plan, that we put into place regulations to ensure openness, fairness and a level playing field. And if history undoubtedly shows us that market forces left to their own devices will inevitably cause these "non existing" problems to arise, why not prevent them from happening in the first place? It is imperative that in this crucial crossroads for the future of media and the Internet, we stop history from repeating itself.

Now is not the time to stop this fight and we must be on the right side of history on this. Opposing Network Neutrality opens the door to discrimination, and works against freedom of speech and our ability to create and distribute our own media. On behalf of the thousands of journalists of color represented by the UNITY alliance, we believe Network Neutrality is essential for a vibrant democracy and to free speech.

We therefore urge you to protect our press freedoms by making sure that telecommunications and cable companies do not take away access to a free and open Internet. The best way to assure a free and open Internet is with clear and strong Net Neutrality rules at the FCC. The Internet is the future of communications and a platform that can elevate the voices that are often left out of mainstream media and our society. Stand with us to strengthen our communities by protecting a free and open Internet.